

EXERCISES TO DEVELOP AND IMPROVE SIMULTANEOUS INTERPRETING SKILLS

The suggested exercises listed here are based on experiences gained in the training of both conference and court interpreters. Since the various modes of interpretation involve many of the same mental tasks, the exercises recommended in the sight translation and consecutive interpreting sections will contribute to the development of simultaneous interpreting (SI) skills as well. The exercises in the sight translation section that are designed to develop analytical techniques are particularly applicable to SI, as are the memory-building exercises outlined in the consecutive interpreting section.

The following exercises, designed specifically to build the skills involved in SI, are divided into those that emphasize dual-tasking and those that emphasize input analysis. These exercises should be done in all of the interpreter's working languages, beginning with the native or more dominant language. They should be practiced daily for about a half hour at a time, as SI skills must be acquired over time to allow for maximum routinization.

Dual-Tasking Exercises

1. Have someone record passages from magazines or newspapers on tape, or record radio or television talk shows or interview programs (news broadcasts are not suitable for these exercises because the pace is too fast and the content is too dense). The subject matter of these passages is irrelevant, but it should not be too technical or contain too many statistics and proper names. Essays and opinion columns are good sources of texts for recording. As you play back the tape, "shadow" the speaker: repeat everything the speaker says verbatim. Try to stay further and further behind the speaker, until you are lagging at least one unit of meaning behind.
2. Once you feel comfortable talking and listening at the same time and are not leaving out too much, begin performing other tasks while shadowing. First, write the numerals 1 to 100 on a piece of paper as you repeat what the speaker says (make sure you are writing and speaking at the same time, not just writing during pauses). When you are able to do that, write the numerals in reverse order, from 100 to 1. Then write them counting by 5s, by 3s, and so on. Note what happens whenever numbers are mentioned in the text you are shadowing.
3. When you are able to do exercise 2 with minimal errors, begin writing out words while shadowing. Begin with your name and address, written repeatedly. Then move on to a favorite poem or a passage such as the preamble to the U.S. Constitution (always choose a passage in the same language as that which you are shadowing). When writing this text, you should copy from a piece of paper placed in front of you. Do not try to write the passage from memory while shadowing the tape.
4. While shadowing the tape as in the previous exercises, write down all the numbers and proper names you hear. Then play the tape back and check to see if you wrote them correctly.

The purpose of the above exercises is to accustom your mind to working on two "channels" at once, and to force you to lag behind the speaker. If you find yourself breezing through the exercise with no problem, move on to the next one. You should be taxing your mental capacities to the fullest at all times. On the other hand, if you are having difficulty keeping up with the speaker and are barely able to mumble a few words at a time, move back to the previous exercise until you are comfortable doing it. These exercises should be repeated as many times as necessary over a long period of time.

Analysis Exercises

1. Using the same tapes you prepared for the above exercises (or new ones, if you have grown tired of those), rephrase what the speaker says rather than simply repeating it (see the paraphrasing exercise in the sight translation section). Stating a message in different words forces you to lag behind the speaker, waiting until he or she has said something meaningful for you to work with. To change the wording of the message without altering the meaning, you must thoroughly

analyze and understand the original message. This exercise also develops your vocabulary because you are constantly searching for synonyms and alternative phrasing. It is perfectly acceptable, and even advisable, to look up words and phrases in a dictionary or thesaurus before attempting to rephrase a passage. It does not matter how many times you go over the tape. Even if you have memorized the passages, you are still deriving benefit from the exercise. Rephrasing simulates mental processes required in SI in that you must abandon the original wording and put the message into a different external form while retaining all of its meaning.

2. To develop your ability to predict the outcome of a message based on your knowledge of the source language syntax and style and on your common sense and experience, do the following exercises with written passages from a magazine or newspaper:
 - a. Cover up the latter half of a sentence and try to predict what it says. Do certain key words in the first half provide important clues?
 - b. Read the title of an entire article or essay and try to predict the content. Confirm or reject your conclusion as you read the article.
 - c. Read the article, paragraph by paragraph, predicting what will come next. Again, pick out key words that contain hints about the direction in which the author is heading.
 - d. Repeat exercises a and b with oral input, having someone read the passages to you.
 - e. As you increase your awareness of key words, learn to look for pitfalls that can lead you astray, such as embedded clauses and dangling participles. Develop your ability to skip over those distractions and get to the heart of a sentence or passage.
3. Using all the techniques you have developed in the preceding exercises, begin interpreting from the source language to the target language. At first, use the tapes you have already recorded and worked on in the other exercises, then make new tapes specifically for interpreting practice. You may want to choose texts related to law and the courts for this purpose, but do not make them too technical at first. When you feel you are ready, record some actual court proceedings for practice. Court reporting schools are a good source of professionally recorded tapes of law-related texts.

Additional exercises and recommendations for improvement can be found in the Federal Court Interpreter Certification Examination Manual (Gonzalez, 1986).